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ABSTRACT

The program of instruction described in this monograph is intended to help prepare high school students with educable mental retardation or perceptual/neurological impairments with basic skills necessary for employment success. The focus of instruction is on practical living skills, with group and individual instruction in such areas as taxes, banking, applications and forms, computer data entry, driver's education, want ads, job interviews, work attitudes and habits, use of tools, time clocks, budgets, and more traditional academic skills such as reading and math. The program uses a multi-sensory approach and integrates academic and vocational learning. The program also includes a weekly field trip for hands-on training. An inventory of job competency indicators is used to evaluate program participants. (Contains 12 references.) (DB)

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LIFE SKILLS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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NEWTON, NEW JERSEY

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Student and teacher materials for **Life Skills Across the Curriculum** are available from the Newton Public Schools. For more information, or to acquire materials, contact:

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New Jersey Department of Education
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LIFE SKILLS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Life Skills Across the Curriculum is a program of instruction which has as its goals the training and preparation of high school Educable Mentally Retarded students for employment. It can also be adapted for high functioning Special Education students such as the Perceptually Impaired or the Neurologically Impaired. In addition to the program description, a combination Teacher Manual/Student Materials booklet is available.

The focus of instruction is practical living skills. Group and individual instruction in such areas as taxes, banking, applications and forms, computer data entry, driver's education, want-ads, job interviews, work attitudes and habits, use of tools, time clocks, budgets, and more traditional academic skills such as spelling, reading, and math is carried out using a multi-sensory approach to facilitate learning on a broad base. The vocational and academic areas are continuously interconnected as well, for greater reinforcement. Spelling words, for example, are taken from job application forms, math lessons use real money and checks, and reading lessons use newspapers and want ads.

A key to the instructional methods is the multi-sensory approach. Mentally Retarded students need massive amounts of repetition and practice. Use of workbooks, computers, audio

tapes, video tapes, overhead projector, worksheets, books, and filmstrips provide a constantly varied source of information the same subject without the abundant boredom problems encountered when the options are more limited.

A unique feature of the program is the weekly field trip for hands-on training. At a local Y.M.C.A. camp, the students receive instruction in maintenance work, pruning and planting shrubs, landscaping, the use of tools, construction, and housekeeping. The field trip is the practical performance side of the program which brings to light the strengths and weaknesses of each student. These areas can the be reinforced or remediated as necessary before the student is faced with a job in the outside world.

This reality-based program provides the students with the life and job skills that they need to survive outside of high school.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For our handicapped students to successful, they must have the job skills and life skills necessary to compete and survive in this world. Yet, the world after high school is becoming increasingly complex. The job skills required for employment are becoming more specialized, and daily living skills are becoming more involved as our society becomes increasingly wrought with problems.

There have always been and will continue to be discussions and differences of opinion on what should be emphasized in the classroom at the secondary level. High school is the last stop in the formal education plans for most mentally retarded students. The students must be proficient in those areas which will assist them later in life. A review of the literature finds that emphasis on job skills and life skills is essential for the education of handicapped students. The need for Life Skills preparation is well documented as reported by Brolin (1982). Topics are sometimes neglected because we assume that everyone should know them automatically. Topics such as how to search and apply for a job, following directions, working with others, getting along socially, and the other daily living skills are a prerequisite for almost every other life option available

to the handicapped student (McCormack, 1972). These student must be able to function as normally as possible in all they do after high school.

The goals of every Secondary Special Education program must be graduation, job preparation, and life skills preparation. The students must be released into the world with the full range of skills necessary for today's society. They do not need specific occupational training skills--these can be acquired on the job. It is necessary they have skills that will make them a better employee and a better citizen. Independence is the goal.

There are many research reports that cite life skills training as essential for future job success (Wircensky, 1982). The array of skills is impressive. An examination of curriculum guides from across the country (EMH Curriculum, 1985) found they include the following:

TIME	**INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS**	**WANT-ADS**
MEASUREMENT	**TELEPHONE SKILLS**	**PAY CHECKS**
NEWSPAPERS	**JOB ATTITUDES**	**BUDGETS**
HOME SAFETY	**JOB BEHAVIORS**	**GROOMING**
MONEY	**JOB APPLICATIONS**	**BANKING**
MENUS	**MAINTENANCE SKILLS**	**SHOPPING**

(Langone & Burton; Margolis, 1982; Ellenberg, 1978; Cosby, 1981)

All of these areas of the curriculum are practical in nature.

They will give the students the ability to function on the job, at home, and in everyday situations. These skills form the basis for the curriculum for handicapped students. So, spelling is not just spelling words out of context, but spelling words on a check or application form. Especially at the secondary level, these areas must be incorporated into all instructional levels and all instructional courses.

When the world changes in future years, so, too, must the skills that handicapped students need. It is difficult to predict with precision the direction these changes will take. Certainly computer skills and those in other technical areas will be in the forefront. Academics must be meaningful in order to be functional. They must maximize the individual's adaptive behavior in the essential life skills (Eiduson & Mitacek, 1984). The curriculum must focus on the skills that will allow the student to make those changes -- to know where to go and how to get along on the job. Success in the world of work is contingent upon competency in everyday life skills (Rivie, 1978). The little, everyday things are important, and must be taught. The role of Special Education has changed over the years. We no longer send students off to institutions after high school. The goal of Special Education is to prepare all student for productive lives when they leave the formal school setting.

In a recent study of high school graduation rates form mentally retarded students, it was found that less than 50% of those students in the last two year study period actually graduated from high school (S.R.I., 1989). This is discouraging and alarming. Perhaps we should start their education in life skills before they enter high school. At any rate, it is vital that we do our utmost to prepare these students as fully as their capabilities permit to allow them the same chance at success and independence available to other students, and to assure that they will be productive citizens and a positive force in society.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This program was conceived in 1978 when the Special Education population in the district began to increase dramatically. More and more students were found to be in need of skills that were just not available in any of the regular academic classes. The students needed skills that would go beyond just the accumulation of graduation credit. They needed skills that would matter in their lives. The program was developed to fill this need.

As described, the curriculum has as its base, practical skills that students will need on the job, at home, in society, in restaurants, etc. Using a multi-sensory approach implies that the student receives instruction from a variety of sources. Every lesson is based upon practical skills.

For a sense of what might happen in the classroom on a daily basis, let us examine the typical routine of a student in this program. "Tom" gets off the bus and reports to the classroom. Class begins at eight o'clock, but Tom's day begins earlier. He goes to the time clock, picks out his card, and signs himself in for the day. This must be done before class starts, just as an hourly wage earner must sign himself in before beginning his day of work. If he arrives early enough, he may work on a rotation basis with the other students in the class making and selling coffee. Two coffee

makers in the classroom allow students to serve faculty members. Tom must measure water and coffee, greet the staff politely, make correct change, clean up, and shop at the local supermarket for supplies. Thus, Tom starts off his day with a great practical lesson!

Classroom announcements may be next. Announcements can vary from current events (radio, television, and newspaper items) to special events (news items, weather, space launchings, etc). A television in the room equipped with cable is a definite advantage. Test announcements might made at this time, or there might be a short lecture on individual or group behavior. Some days Tom may bring up events that he has heard about. The students are encouraged to watch the news and weather daily in order to become more familiar with the things that are going on around them. Along with making them more aware of the world, this will help them converse in social settings in an appropriate way.

Math follows class announcements. Math consists of instruction in money using real coins and bills from the coffee sales, basic math functions, use of a calculator, banking, check-writing, income taxes, measurement, and time. Tom might be taught individually one day and in a group the next. He works on a computer, in a workbook, from a textbook, from a filmstrip, and from videotapes, all in

limited time segments in keeping with his attention span. All modes of presentation repeat the same practical skills that he is stockpiling for the future. Every three to four weeks his skills will be tested, and he will be retaught whenever necessary.

Tom's next challenge is to report to a regular homeroom. Proper behavior in that homeroom is taught and expected. At the end of homeroom period, Tom returns to the classroom for the next instructional class, in this case, Vocational English. Vocational English, like the Math class, is geared to the job skills and life skills Tom needs to acquire. A variety of areas are taught: driver's education, job applications and forms, newspaper want-ads, interviewing skills, work attitudes, social skills, etc. On this day, the unit might be on driver's education. Many students will be able to get a driver's license; others will not. In any case, it is imperative that all know what to look for in a good driver so that they will be careful in selecting someone to ride with. Instruction uses the driver's manual, filmstrips on situational driving, videotapes on safety, practical tests, and computer programs. A spelling quiz of Friday will cover ten words selected from the driving manual.

Reading is the next subject in which Tom will be instructed. Instruction may, again, be in groups or

individual, and once again Tom will receive information from a variety of books, workbooks, filmstrips, and computer programs dealing with practical skills. In this class he may encounter lessons in following directions, words on the job, decoding diagrams, or reading labels. All of the materials and lessons in this class will be focused on survival skills and job skills, and progress will be assessed through periodic quizzes and tests. Weak areas will be diagnosed and stressed in additional lessons.

At this juncture, Tom has a variety of choices. He may have been scheduled to attend a mainstream class, to go to a specialty class, or to remain in my room for further instruction. Students are only mainstreamed into practical regular classes -- foods, clothing, shop, work-study -- not academic classes. In the specialty classes -- Vocational Typing, Crafts, Adaptive Physical Education -- the students get instruction in life skill areas which will add to the quality of their lives and blend with the skill training they are receiving in the program. If Tom remains in my classroom, he will work on the computer with data-entry programs, work with a calculator on math problem, read newspapers, or use the tape recorder to reinforce listening skills.

As the day continues and draws to a close, there is

still much to be done. Coffee makers must be cleaned and reset for the next day; inventory must be taken to assure that there are sufficient supplies for tomorrow's customers, he must organize himself and his belongings for the trip home and the coming day, and finally, he must sign himself out using the time clock, just as he would on any job. It is a full and practical day!

A feature that is unique to the program is the weekly field trip. The class spends a full day each week, September to June, in the field regardless of weather. A few phone calls and personal visits gained the cooperation of a local Y.M.C.A. camp. Local parks, Green Acres projects, and similar locations are usually accessible and will provide a viable location for some real-life work experience. The students do work that is necessary and meaningful to them and to the camp. They have built a dam, transplanted and pruned trees, cleared trails, built a bridge, cleaned cabins, cleared brush, and reroofed a building. All of these activities permitted them to learn positive work habits and attitudes, proper use of a variety of equipment, the need for cooperation in working with others, and appropriate behavior on a job site. In this atmosphere, the strengths and weaknesses of each student are readily apparent. Areas in need of remediation become visible, and measures can be taken

in the classroom to correct the problems.

Tom has spent his day, whether in the classroom or in the field, immersed in real life skills. Subjects taught were based on these skills and they run as a continuous thread throughout the curriculum. Mentally retarded students need the time and opportunity to practice life skills in order for improvement to become apparent, and they need the improvement in order to become competitive in the job market. They need to know the skills that will help them through out the day no matter where it may lead them. This curriculum gives Tom and his classmates these skills on a daily basis in situations similar to those in which the skills will be used. The graduation rate in the past two years of this program's implementation reached 90% --definitely a significant improvement over the national standard of 50%. The curriculum keeps the students interested in school. When they finally leave, they leave will prepared to face the world and the future.

TEACHER/STUDENT ACTIVITIES

The newspaper is an inexpensive and indispensable tool that has many uses in this program. Want-ads for jobs, coupons, sales advertised at stores, food ads, and apartment rental ads lend themselves easily to practical lessons.

Cut out the full-page supermarket ads, for example, and make a list of items to bus as suggested below:

ITEM	COST	STORE
Bread		
Cheese		
Pizza		
Hot dogs		
Hamburger		

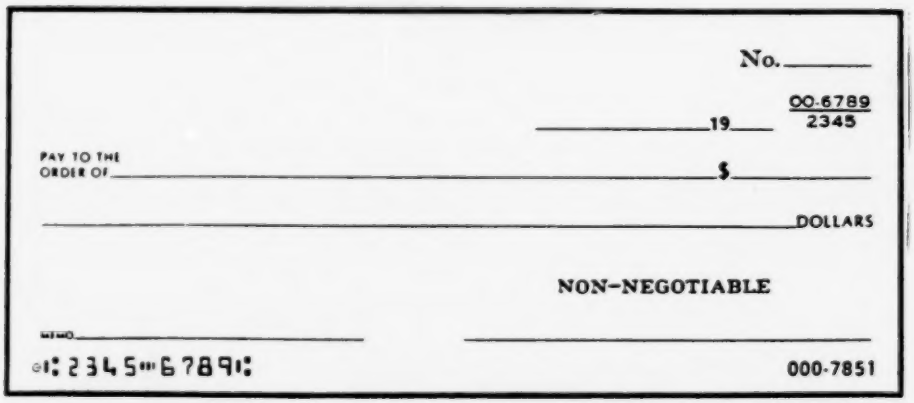
TOTAL COST _____

The students, working in a group or as individuals, may then use the newspaper ads which were distributed along with the shopping list to locate the items by store and record the prices. Occasionally, they may be asked to record just the lowest price from all the stores, thus gaining experience in comparison shopping. The total cost may be used to give practice in making change (from a twenty dollar bill, a ten dollar bill, etc.), and may be incorporated into a budgeting lesson or a check writing lesson. Use of a calculator should be encouraged as is permits a higher level of functioning.

The fact that a calculator may be carried at all times and used in real-life situations might be stressed. A spelling lesson using the shopping list can then also be given before, during, and after the main assignment.

Another area to be stressed is the mechanics of check-writing. Many supermarkets and virtually all retail establishments permit payment by check, so this is a logical follow-up lesson.

Prepare an oversized check on a clear plastic sheet for display using an overhead projector. When this is projected onto a movie screen, it gives a workable example for use in showing the students step-by-step procedure for check-writing (see sample check below).



Fill in each item on the sample check while the students watch and match you item-for-item on their own checks. After two or three examples have been completed, allow the students

to fill in a check by themselves with the example still on the overhead. Finally, have the students write a check without the example. The projected sample can then be used to check completed work. To incorporate as much realism as possible, they might write checks to the power company, the phone company, the supermarket, or other local establishments with which they might actually have contact.

The application form also lends itself to the lesson structure. A teacher-made form may be used:

Name _____ **Telephone**_____

Address _____ **Social Security No.** _____

Birthdate _____ **Age** ____ **Sex** ____ **Height** ____ **Weight** _____

Emergency Contact Person _____

Mother's Place of Work _____

Father's Place of Work _____

Health _____ **Family Doctor** _____

Signature _____

Real application forms may be obtained from local stores, the bank, or fast food establishments. Again, use of the overhead projector will allow the example to be clearly filled out. The students follow along, filling out their own forms step-by-step, and finally, filling out forms completely on their own and using the overhead transparency for correction purposes. All of the words can be used in weekly

spelling tests.

Since there are many concepts involved in the filling out of an application, the lesson should be broken down into several sections. There will have to be many repetitions using as many different media as are available -- workbooks, worksheets, filmstrips, etc.

These samples are but a few of the variations that can be contrived to stress the same critical basic skills in a more practical approach to academics. For additional teacher and student materials, please consult the **Teacher/Student Life Skills Handbook** that accompanies this program description.

EVALUATION

A skills-based program such as this one lends itself easily to quantitative evaluation. In this case, the assessment instruments used were:

1. **Participant Evaluation Checklist for Job Competency indicators (see below)**

-and-

2. **31 Subsections of the Brigance Inventory of Essential Skills.**

JOB COMPETENCY INDICATORS

The students were tested in September, 1989, and again in June, 1990. The results show positive growth in both the student competencies and essential skill (see chart below for specific data). Based on a scale of 1 - 4 (minimum skill, maximum 4) the above chart shows the competency level averages pre and post-test and average increase for each competency.

Pre Assessment Date_____ Monthly Assessment Date_____ Period Covered _____ To_____ Post Assessment Date_____ Competency Indicators	Pre-test	Post-test	Increase
1. The participant has identified upon a general career goal.	1.25	2.83	1.58
2. The participant has an understanding of his/her chosen field and is aware of steps needed to obtain his/her career goal.	1.16	2.75	1.59
3. The participant can fill out a job application (Sample Applications).	1.83	2.92	1.09
4. The participant knows how to conduct themselves properly on a job interview.	1.33	2.92	1.59
5. The participant displays correct proper telephone techniques.	2.08	3.25	1.17
6. The participant is familiar with specific job hunting techniques.	1.08	2.92	1.84
7. The participant demonstrates good attendance.	1.92	3.83	1.91
8. The participant demonstrates good punctuality.	1.92	3.83	1.91
9. The participant follows supervisors instructions and demonstrates an acceptable level of performance.	1.92	3.50	1.58
10. The participant completes given tasks to the satisfaction of supervisor.	1.83	3.67	1.84
11. The participant demonstrates initiative in carrying out work assignments independently.	1.83	3.50	1.67
12. The participant is attentive and willing to learn work assignments.	1.92	3.67	1.75
13. The participant practices good hygiene and dresses appropriately for his job.	2.00	3.58	1.58
14. The participant interacts with co-workers and supervisor in compatable and appropriate manner.	1.92	3.67	1.75
15. The participant displayed honesty throughout training period.	2.25	3.75	1.50

Each student was rated on 15 separated items relating to knowledge of jobs and performance on job-related tasks. It was predicted that ten out of fourteen students would improve in ten out of fifteen competencies. Two students moved out of the area during the school year, leaving twelve students. The results for those twelve students, as displayed in the table below, indicate that all twelve reached the predicted level of competency and achieved the predicted growth. Eight out of twelve showed improvement in all fifteen competencies, three out of the twelve showed improvement in fourteen of the fifteen competencies, and one showed improvement in thirteen of the fifteen competencies. The overall results show an average growth of over one level of performance on each of the fifteen competencies rated. These results represent a truly positive growth for the group and for each student individually.

All of the competency indicators were items that are emphasized daily in class. This program, **Life Skill Across the Curriculum**, will improve the competencies of educable mentally retarded students in the areas that are stressed when the program is implemented. The growth of each student shows that this program works.

INVENTORY OF ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Using the Inventory of Essential Skills and the same pre-/post-test schedule, all the students were tested in 31 subsections as listed below:

ABBREVIATIONS	**WARNING/SAFETY SIGNS**
INFORMATION SIGNS	**TELEVISION SCHEDULE**
ADDRESSING ENVELOPES	**SCHOOL INFORMATION**
COMPUTER BASE FORM	**CONVERSION OF COINS**
TIME	**EQUIVALENT CALENDAR UNITS**
MEDICINE LABELS	**WARNING LABELS**
ATTITUDE RATING	**PERSONALITY**
RATING	**RESPONSIBILITY RATING**
ABBREVIATIONS	**EMPLOYMENT SIGNS EMPLOYMENT**
HELP WANTED ADS	**JOB APPLICATIONS**
JOB INTERVIEWS	**W-4 FORM**
PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS	**MAKING CHANGE**
CHECKING ACCOUNT	**TRAFFIC SIGNS**
TRAFFIC SYMBOLS	**FOOD VOCABULARY**
FOOD LABELS	**CLOTHING**

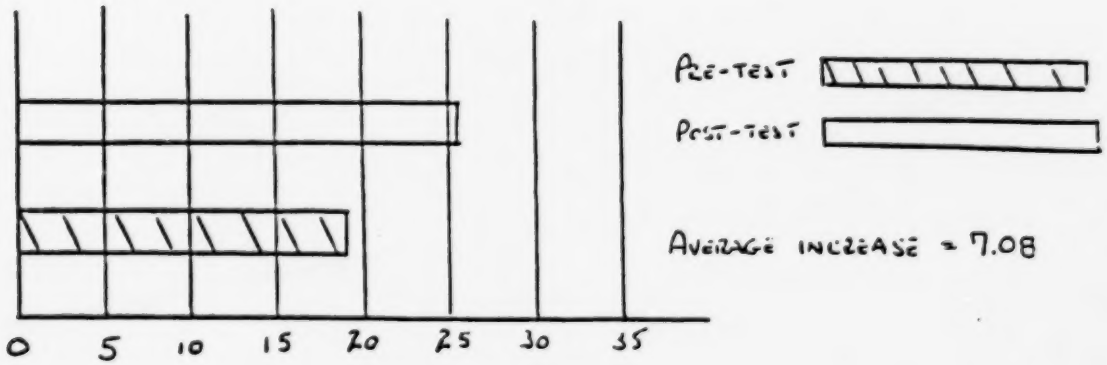
EQUIVALENT VALUES OF COINS/DOLLARS

TOTAL VALUES/COLLECTING OF COINS

Of the 31 subsections, addressing envelopes does not produce a numerical score. This leaves 30 subsections upon which the results are based. Since the population was so

small, no control group was possible. The variables of chronological age, mental age, and sex were not analyzed as they are not variables which the classroom teacher can control in implementing the program.

It was predicted that each student would show an average growth of 3.75 month from pre-test to post-test after participation in the **Life Skills Curriculum**. The results of the testing show that every student surpassed the predicted growth target (see graph). Each student, after participating in the **Life Skills Curriculum** program showed a growth of at least 4.40 month as measured on the pre- and post-tests. The average growth was 7.08 months, with a range from 4.40 to 10.20 months growth.



The chart shows average growth between pre- and post-test age referenced scores on the Brigance Inventory of Essential Skills.

It is important to note that all students surpassed the predicted increases, and as a group, the average increase nearly doubled the predicted improvement.

There are several factors within the curriculum that account for this growth. (1) The topics are emphasized daily and for the entire course of the day's classes. (2) The students receive instruction through a variety of media appealing to the full range of learning styles and permitting the use of all the senses in learning. (3) The skills being taught are essential and are, therefore, reinforced through use outside of school in real-life situations. The results clearly show a dramatic increase in the job, life, and attitude skills of all of the students.

This program is essentially a four- or five-year program. We alternate subjects, repeat workbooks, and continually work on practical skills. One year is insufficient time to cover everything in the curriculum. Therefore, additional pre-/post-testings will be done on a long-term basis, at the beginning and end of the four or five years of the program. Given the positive and encouraging results over the short-term, the long-term results promise to be very interesting.

In summary, the results were positive in both the

Competencies and the Essential Skills areas. Students showed more than the predicted growth on both arrays. One can only conclude that the program is effective. Participation in this program will give students the skills necessary for success in the world after high school.

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